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ABSTRACT

Force field analysis encourages members to examine the probability of reaching agreed-upon goals. It can help groups avoid working toward goals that are unlikely to be reached. In every situation are three forces: forces that encourage maintenance of the status quo or change; driving or helping forces that push toward change; and restraining forces that resist change. In conducting a force field analysis, the discussion leader asks two questions: What forces will help achieve the goal or objective? and What forces will hinder? All ideas are listed. The facilitator asks the group to select two or three important restraining and driving forces that they might be able to alter. Participants are asked to suggest specifically what might be done to change them. Responses are written down. After examining the driving and restraining forces, the group considers the balance between driving and restraining forces. If the group believes forces can be affected enough to create momentum toward the goal, it can realistically pursue the goal. If not, the group may decide to alter the goal or to drop it and pursue others. Three suggestions for using this procedure are as follows: force field analysis should take place in smaller groups of 20 or less; the discussion leader should behave as a neutral facilitator; and participants are encouraged to correct statements. Potential benefits include the following: better designed goals that reflect diverse and critical thinking, better understanding of goal opposition and support, and minimized confrontation and friction. (YLB)

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FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS: INCORPORATING CRITICAL THINKING IN GOAL SETTING

There are often several major challenges faced by groups in goal setting processes that simple techniques may address constructively.

First, groups tend to set overly ambitious goals. Little attention is paid to forces that work against or push towards their goals before action plans are developed.

Second, individuals who aren't responsible for implementing group decisions often set more difficult goals than those who are. Consequently, aspirations are unrealistic and usually end in failure.

Third, many organizations are victims of "group think." That is, individuals within the group may be reluctant to voice their concerns about a particular project or goal because of fear they will be perceived as disloyal or non supportive of the team. Group think also occurs when individuals in a community have backgrounds and aspirations that are so similar that they aren't aware of other's viewpoints which can also result in unrealistic group goals.

There are several ways to overcome these challenges. Seeking viewpoints from individuals that will reflect more diverse ideas requires substantial effort. Leaders should be aware of the tendency to set overly optimistic goals and to guard against them. Force-field analysis can help leaders take these steps effectively. Other tools that might be used include Community Issues Gatherings (Hustedde, 1994) or Study Circles (1993). This discussion provides a guide to the use of force-field analysis.

Guide To Force-Field Analysis

Force-field analysis was developed by the noted sociologist, Kurt Lewin, in the 1940s. According to Lewin, organizations and individuals operate within a psychological and social environment. The "life space" of this environment is called a "field." The relationship between various "forces" in a field can halt or encourage change. Organizations and groups are better equipped to handle and plan for change when they increase their understanding of force relationships.

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"Force-field analysis is difficult to apply when goals are poorly defined.

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Force-field analysis encourages members to carefully examine the probability of reaching agreed upon goals. When used properly, it can help groups avoid working toward goals that are unlikely to be reached.

The procedure calls for a clear definition of a potential goal. Participants identify forces that act to drive movement towards the goal or restrain group efforts to bring about desired outcomes. If the group determines that it is possible to achieve a goal after analyzing forces and their ability to influence them, the group proceeds. If the group feels it cannot significantly influence the forces, the goal is dropped or amended, at least for the present.

Force-field analysis is used frequently in corporate and community settings. It can be applied to goals that are being established or established goals that need to be reexamined. Groups use force-field analysis to periodically review the practicality of their goals and whether the goal should be readjusted. Force-field analysis is difficult to apply when goals are poorly defined.

Some critics of force-field analysis claim that the tool is limited because the world can not be divided into two fields, those in favor and those against a goal or project. The critics assert there is a large gray area or a third force factor that must be dealt with. This third force could be called the "rainbow effect" because it is a combination of both negative and positive forces. If it appears that a third force is in effect, the discussion leader asks the group if such a force exists and then to examine the effects of this third force. Similar approaches that are outlined in the discussion on strategy design can be used to deal with this third force.

It should be noted this discussion is limited to goal setting situations. Relatively ittle attention will be paid to the use of the action plans neccesary to reached the desired goals.

Procedure:

There are forces in every situation that encourage maintenance of the status quo or change. Forces that push towards change are called driving or helping forces. Forces that resist change are called restraining forces. If change is to occur, the strength of some forces must be altered so that movement can take place. Examples of forces include people, organizations, resources, attitudes, traditions and values.

The discussion leader asks two questions. What forces will help you achieve your goal or objective? What forces will hinder you from achieving your goal or objective? All ideas are listed on newsprint or other materials that will be easily visible to the groups. It is important that the discussion is led in a way that encourages everyone to participate. The facilitator should encourage active listening, and discourage domination by more outspoken individuals. As the ideas are listed on flip charts, the discussion leader asks participants not to place a value judgement on anything that is said. Rather, the participants identify as many forces as possible. The process encourages participants to think critically, and to explore new ways of viewing the forces at work in the community.

Strategy design

There are at least two ways to create an imbalance between forces that will result in movement toward or away from a particular goal. Driving forces can be strengthened. Restraining forces can be weakened. In force-field analysis, the facilitator asks the group to select two or three important restraining forces and two or three important driving forces that they might be able to alter. After this selection, participants are asked to suggest specifically what might be done to change them. The responses are written on flip chart paper and taped to the wall. Following is a suggested format for recording group perceptions and ideas:

Restraining force A

What can be done to reduce the effect of this force?

-
-
-

Restraining force B

What can be done to reduce the effect of this force?

-
-
-

Driving force A

What can be done to increase the effect of this force?

-
-
-

Driving force B

What can be done to increase the effect of this force?

-
-
-

Discussion during the analysis of these forces should be led in a brainstorming fashion. Allow the group to identify as many force-influencing actions as time allows.

Goal decision

After examining the driving and restraining forces, the group considers the balance between driving and restraining forces. If the group believes forces can be affected enough to create momentum toward the goal, it can realistically pursue the goal. If not, the group may decide to alter the goal or to drop the goal and pursue others. It is important to remember that this process represents the group's assessment of forces and their ability to influence them. It is possible for groups to make errors in judgement. For

In force-field analysis, the facilitator asks the group to select two or three important restraining forces and two or three important driving forces. . .

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this reason, results of force-field analysis should be reviewed from time to time.

The discussion leader should behave as a neutral facilitator during force-field analysis.

Tips for Facilitators

- It is suggested that force-field analysis take place in smaller groups, preferably 20 people or less. Otherwise, individual input is minimal. If more participants show up at a meeting, the group can be subdivided into smaller groups.
- The discussion leader should behave as a neutral facilitator during force-field analysis.
- Participants should be encouraged to correct a statement on the flip chart that does not accurately reflect their ideas about restraining or driving forces.

Examples of Force-Field Analysis In Use

- An advisory committee for a county office of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service evaluated the feasibility of initiating a farmer's market. Restraining forces included the existence of produce markets through retail chain outlets, the amount of volunteer commitment required to develop an effective marketing strategy, and the high price of real estate relative to the scale of the market appropriate for the small rural community. Driving forces included strong local preference for locally produced goods, the political and social networks of planning committee members, and existing plans to promote tourism and economic development in the county.

  After analysis of the forces, the group decided that it was feasible to attempt organization of a farmer's market. The group reviewed actions recommended for strengthening driving forces and weakening restraining forces. A leader was assigned to coordinate efforts to address each action since addressing all of them was required to create momentum in the direction of goal realization.

- A group of 60 people evaluated the potential for success of a planned county-wide recycling program. The group consisted of middle-school students, teachers, parents, and college faculty. Students showed very little enthusiasm for contributing to recycling efforts. Remarks indicated their perception that solid waste disposal was a problem for public officials to solve. There was a sense that recycling required extra efforts on the part of citizens with no direct financial benefit to participants. This sector of the community indicated that the goal would not be realized given the present balance of forces in the community. The recycling program was initiated by the County Fiscal Court in response to a state mandate that solid waste disposal through regional landfills be reduced by 25%. The Extension office informed the County Executive that participants would like the goal re-framed. One alternative could be assigning the sorting of solid waste to county

employees. Another could be attempting to meet the state mandate using a different strategy.

- State policy makers were interested in developing and implementing a comprehensive health care reform policy. The Governor of Kentucky proposed a seven point plan and solicited public analysis through regional forums. In a rural Appalachian county, force-field analysis was used to evaluate three of the plan's components. Even though the group recognized shortfalls of the proposal, they identified specific steps that could be taken in order to create broad public support for the Governor's efforts.

Potential Benefits of Force-field Analysis

- Better designed goals that reflect diverse and critical thinking.
- Better understanding of goal opposition and support.
- Minimization of needless confrontation and friction within and outside the organization.

In a rural Appalachian county, force-field analysis was used to evaluate three of the plan's components.

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